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OUR INHERITED PRACTICE IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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Many who are interested in the training of elementary teachers are questioning the value of the history of education. Could not the time be spent to better advantage on a more direct study of present educational practice? The critics of the history of education may admit that doubtless any serious consideration of education by students helps them somewhat in their thinking. They will contend, however, that too much rumination about theories as theories, with no occasion for application, develops habits of pure speculation which not only waste time, but often interfere with efficiency. When this speculation concerns itself with situations and thought, hundreds or thousands of years removed, there is little chance of its functioning in the actual work of the young teacher.

Without attempting to argue the matter out with these critics, we may fall back on the simple consideration that the history of education will continue for some time to form a part of most normal-school courses. As long as this is the case, it is important to put into the instruction such content as will be most likely to modify the everyday thinking and practice of the students. Looked at from this standpoint, the material ordinarily found in the histories of education may be roughly classified as follows in the order of increasing value:

1. The history of philosophy masquerading as the history of education. The substitution of this material for education results from the fact that courses in education have often developed in higher institutions in departments of philosophy, and the speculations of philosophers about education have been most accessible for treatment. Material of this sort is almost meaningless even to many graduate students; it is certainly incomprehensible to the

great majority of normal-school students, and its connection with practice is very remote.

2. Biographical accounts of the more concrete writers on education, such as Montaigne, Ascham, Locke, and Rousseau. Quick's *Educational Reformers* is the best example of this type of history of education. Such material as that presented by Quick is so simple that normal-school students understand it. Much of it belongs rather to the history of literature than to the history of education. It serves the purpose of introducing students to a consideration of many educational questions in an unsystematized form, as, for example, through Montaigne's discussion of the futility of memorizing. These writers are, however, generally studied without adequate historical setting. The student does not realize the social and educational situation which confronted them nor does he appreciate the effects of their works on future practice.

3. Summaries of the more obvious aspects of education in various parts of the world beginning with China 2,000 years before Christ and coming down to the present century in America. Often all of this is contained in small volumes of about 300 pages. The worthlessness of such skeleton outlines of historical development has long been admitted in history courses which have for their sole aim information and culture. As material which may function in modifying a teacher's attitude and practice, a cursory outline is even more worthless. Changes in education are relatively meaningless to the student of such a text, because the social situation from which these changes arise and which they in turn modify, is not presented.

4. Type studies of limited periods, with their social and economic and material setting. One of the best examples of this kind of history of education is the account of Renaissance education given by Professor Woodward, of England. The classical humanistic education is filled with meaning for the student as he realizes that it was a necessary consequence of the life of the castles and city states of northern Italy. Such a study continued down to the present time should furnish a valuable perspective for those interested in practical problems of high-school cur-

ricula. An appreciation of our inherited practices in high schools thus gained from an examination of the historical setting of such schools may become a strong factor in rationalizing a teacher's attitude toward high-school problems.

This fourth kind of treatment of the history of education, namely, type studies of limited periods, showing the social, economic, and material conditions of the period, is possible in normal schools for elementary teachers. Some material for such a course is now available and a few chapters will be presented in this and subsequent papers. The period of central interest will be the time from the American Revolution to the present day. To understand the conditions of educational practice about 1775 it will be necessary to devote the remainder of this first paper to a brief consideration of the period just prior to the Revolution.

In the New England colonies a bookish elementary education originated from the demand that everyone read the Bible.

Most teachers are familiar with the life and character of the New England Puritans. Their educational practice followed logically from their mode of life. Let us review a few of their characteristics, important from this standpoint.

In the first place the Puritans were religious reformers, a part of the Protestant Reformation. Theoretically, they believed in the principle that an individual's religion was a matter between himself and God, and that a study of the Bible was the way to religious truth. They had rejected the authority of the church of Rome and the dogmas that had developed in the Middle Ages. They desired to "purify" the English church even further and reject prayers read from a book, the surplice, and all other religious forms. As Fischer expresses it, "They wanted to reduce Christianity to its most primitive form of four bare walls and the literal words of the Bible."¹ They came to America to establish a condition of religious life in accordance with these ideals. To be sure, they soon developed canons of religious orthodoxy almost as narrow and bigoted as any that had been held during the Middle Ages, and that were utterly inconsistent with the freedom of conscience which the Reformation advocated. But reli-

¹ S. A. Fischer, *Men, Women, and Manners in Colonial Times*, Vol. I, p. 125.

gion continued to be their chief interest, and the Bible the central object of study. As Elson says, "The state was founded on religion and religion was its life. The entire political, social, and industrial fabric was built on religion."²

The intense interest in the Bible and the prominent place it occupied in their intellectual and religious life is most significant. The same condition existed in Puritan England and is described by Green in these words:

England became the people of a book and that book was the Bible. It was as yet the one English book that was familiar to every Englishman; it was read at churches and read at home, and everywhere its words, as it fell on ears which custom had not deadened, kindled a startling enthusiasm. The popularity of the Bible was owing to other causes besides that of religion. The whole prose literature of England, save the forgotten tracts of Wyclif, has grown up since the translation of the Scriptures by Tyndale [1525] and Coverdale [1538]. So far as the nation at large was concerned, no history, no romance, hardly any poetry, save the little-known verse of Chaucer, existed in the English tongue when the Bible was ordered to be set up in churches. Sunday after Sunday, day after day, the crowds that gathered around Bonner's Bible in the nave of St. Paul's, or the family group that hung on the words of the Geneva Bible in the devotional exercises at home, were leavened with a new literature. The power of the book over the mass of Englishmen showed itself in a thousand superficial ways, and in none more conspicuously than in the influence it exerted on ordinary speech. It formed, we must repeat, the whole literature that was practically accessible to ordinary Englishmen.³

Such was the intellectual life of the New England Puritans. It was intense and vigorous in its way. This is shown by the attendance on sermons, Sunday morning and afternoon, note-taking at such sermons, long theological discussions. But it lacked many of the interests considered important at the present day. There was no popular interest in science, no appreciation of secular literature, no art, no drama, no forms of higher amusements. The natural impulses were considered evil, and a moody introspection of one's sins a virtue.

On the practical side, the New England settlers were small farmers, fishermen, shipbuilders, sailors, and merchants. There

² Elson, *History of the United States*, p. 128.

³ Green, *Short History of the English People*, chap. viii.

was little manufacturing, most necessary articles being made in the home. The farmer was generally his own mechanic, and the women made a variety of products. G. Stanley Hall has enumerated about sixty trades that were represented in the activities of a New England farm.

The importance of keeping in mind the industrial activities of the household, and neighborhood in a study of colonial education has been emphasized particularly by Dr. Dewey in his *School and Society*.

The household was practically the center in which were carried on, or about which were clustered, all the typical forms of industrial occupation. The clothing worn was for the most part not only made in the house, but the members of the household were generally familiar with the shearing of the sheep, the carding and spinning of the wool and the plying of the loom. Instead of pressing a button and flooding the house with electric light, the whole process of getting illumination stood revealed in its toilsome length, from the killing of the animal and the trying of the fat, to the making of wicks and dipping of candles. The supply of flour, of lumber, of foods, of building materials, of household furniture, even of metal-ware, of nails, hinges, hammers, etc., was in the immediate neighborhood, in shops which were constantly open to inspection and often centers of neighborhood congregation.*

These were the activities and interests for which education had to prepare. Let us see what provision was made for them in elementary schools. The well-known preamble to the law passed by the Massachusetts General Court in 1647 is the clearest expression of the religious basis of this education. The same preamble is copied in the Connecticut law of 1650, the phraseology being slightly improved.

It being one chief project of that old deluder, Satan, to keep men from a knowledge of the Scriptures, as in former times, keeping them in an unknown tongue, so in these latter times, by persuading them from the use of tongues, so that at least, the true sense and meaning of the original might be clouded by false glosses of saint-seeming deceivers; and that learning may not be buried in the grave of our fore-fathers [the court decreed that whenever a township increased to fifty householders they should employ someone] to teach all such children as shall resort to him, to write and read.

*P. 22.

An earlier Massachusetts ordinance of the year 1642 had required parents and masters of children to train the latter "to read and understand the principles of religion and the capital laws of the country." The Connecticut law of 1650 made the same requirement, with additional religious training as follows, "That all masters of families, do, once a week, at least, catechize their children and servants in the grounds and principles of religion."

The work of elementary education is definitely stated in these laws. It is to be writing and reading, a knowledge of the principles of religion and the capital laws, and the learning of the catechism.

The chief work of the school came to be the teaching of the two formal subjects, writing and reading. There is no mention of spelling, arithmetic, composition, drawing, singing, object-study, physiology, nature-study, geography, history, secular literature, or manual training. For the purpose of rural New England Puritan life even writing was of minor importance. Reading was the all-important subject. Our first systems of American elementary schools were fundamentally reading schools for religious purposes.

Such was the training given in elementary school. But there was another kind of training of importance provided in the same laws, but not given in the schools. It was training in industrial activities. As stated in the Connecticut law of 1650 the requirement reads:

that all parents and masters do breed and bring up their children and apprentices in some honest lawful labor, or employment, either in husbandry or some other trade profitable for themselves and the commonwealth, if they will not nor cannot train them up in learning, to fit them for higher employments, and if any of the selectmen, after admonition by them given to such masters of families, shall find them still negligent of their duty, . . . the said selectmen, with the help of two magistrates, shall take such children or apprentices from them, and place them with some masters for years, boys until they come to be twenty-one, and girls to eighteen years of age complete.

The Massachusetts law of 1642, the Pennsylvania law of 1683, and other colonial laws made similar provisions.

Thus we find compulsory industrial education provided for

very early, in fact at the same time as schools for teaching to read. This training for a trade, together with the many things learned in the home, and the narrow interests and austere life of the New Englanders, enable us to understand why such narrow and specialized instruction was left to the elementary school. It is essential that the student keep in mind the industrial training formerly received outside the school, in order to appreciate recent developments in elementary education.

Elementary education of the early type continued with little change to the Revolution. Reading and writing were fundamental; spelling and arithmetic were added.

Little change occurred in the instruction offered in the American elementary schools from their establishment to the time of the Revolutionary War. They remained primarily reading-and-writing schools, with one or two other subjects for older children. This is evident from the account given by Noah Webster of the schools in which he had been educated. I quote his statement because it presents very definitely and concretely what is shown by other accounts to have been the common practice. Spelling and arithmetic had been added to the work of the elementary schools, otherwise there was little change. Webster's account is as follows:

When I was young, the books used were, chiefly or wholly, Dilworth's *Spelling Books*, the Psalter, Testament, and Bible. No geography was studied before the publication of Dr. Morse's small books on that subject, about the year 1786 or 1787. No history was read, as far as my knowledge extends, for there was no abridged history of the United States. Except the books above mentioned, no book for reading was used before the publication of the third part of my *Institute*, in 1785. In some of the early editions of that book, I introduced short notices of the geography and history of the United States, and these led to more enlarged descriptions of the country. In 1788 at the request of Dr. Morse, I wrote an account of the transactions in the United States, after the Revolution; which account fills nearly twenty pages in the first volume of his octavo editions.

Before the Revolution, and for some years after, no slates were used in the common schools: all writing and the operations in arithmetic were on paper. The teacher wrote the copies and gave the sums in arithmetic;

few or none of the pupils having any books as a guide. Such was the condition of the schools in which I received my early education.

The introduction of my *Spelling Book*, first published in 1783, produced a great change in the department of spelling.

No English grammar was generally taught in common schools when I was young, except that in Dilworth, and that to no good purpose. In short the instruction in schools was very imperfect.⁵

A concrete picture of the work of elementary schools in Boston at the beginning of the nineteenth century, may be found in the reminiscences of Henry K. Oliver, who attended them. He went to three grades of school, first the A B C school, second the reading school, and then the Latin grammar school. We are not concerned with the latter which was to prepare for college, but will follow his career in the elementary school.

A B C SCHOOL

In the year 1805, or thereabouts, being then something under five years of age, I was consigned to the care of one Mr. Hayslop, who, with his wife and widowed daughter, kept school in an old building. By him I was taught my A, B, C, D, E, F, G, my a, b, ab's and my e, b, eb's, after the old, old way—praised because ancestral—the old gentleman holding an old book in his old hand and pointing, with an old pin, to the old letters on the old page, and making each of us chicks repeat their several names till we could tell them at sight, though we did not know what it was all for. We must have been a bright set, excellent of memory, for with this excellent old method, and with the excellent old books of the old times, and the excellent old teacher, and our own excellent young wits, we were not more than four or five weeks in acquiring complete knowledge of the twenty-six arbitrary marks constituting the English alphabet. To be sure, I learned the names, family and Christian, of all my fellow-scholars, and they were quite a host, in a week; but that was, as it were, naturally—by instinct, as Falstaff knew the true prince—while to learn the letters must only be done after the good old fashion of the ancestral teaching, the teachers of those days holding faithfully to the first line of Pope's couplet:

Be not the first by whom the new is tried,
And wholly ignoring the second:

Nor yet the last to lay the old aside.

DAME SCHOOL OR READING SCHOOL

From this school I was removed to another, Madam Tileston's, in Hanover, below Salem Street, of the same general character, where I was

⁵ Barnard, *American Journal of Education*, Vol. XXVI, p. 196.

taught elementary reading and spelling, after the same ancestral fashion—that is, I received about twenty minutes of instruction each half day and as school was kept three hundred and sixty minutes daily, I had the privilege of forty minutes' worth of teaching, and three hundred and twenty minutes' worth of sitting still (if I could), which I could not—playing, whispering, and general waste of time, though occasionally a picture-book relieved the dreary monotony.

My nervous temperament, dislike of confinement at busy nothingness, want of affection for books—slates then we had none—love of mischief, and general habit of fidgetiness, often entitled me to Madam Tileston's customary punishment of sundry sharp taps on the head, with the middle finger of her right hand; said finger being armed, for its own defense, with a large and rough steel thimble.

Both of these teachers taught as well as they knew how—and as well as the times in which they lived and worked permitted them to know. Nobody taught any better so far as I have learned. Nor was there anything like the philosophy of teaching known or thought of, so far as I can judge on retrospection, by any teacher into whose hands I fell.

There were no schools systematically graded; there were no blackboards; there were no globes, nor ordinary apparatus in schools I attended. I never saw a full-sized map, nor illustrative picture of any sort suspended against the school wall.⁶

There was no object-teaching; in fact, there was no teaching at all, in the modern sense of the word. The master's time was all consumed with hearing lessons, making pens, setting copies, and keeping order.

The account given of New England education from its origin to the Revolutionary War has shown the following general points: (1) that elementary schools were established primarily to teach children to read the Bible and other religious literature; (2) that compulsory industrial training was provided for by law; (3) that little change had taken place up to the Revolution, the main purpose of the schools continuing to be the teaching of children to read and write.

This development of elementary education in America is paralleled by similar developments in many of the countries of Europe, particularly those in which the spirit of the Protestant Reformation was strongest. In some of the Catholic countries, the Catholic Reformation (or so-called Counter Reformation),

⁶ Barnard, *American Journal of Education*, Vol. XXVI, p. 209.

resulted in a similar general establishment of schools in which children were trained in reading and writing, and in a knowledge of religious texts. Most notable among the Catholic schools were those maintained by the Brethren of the Christian Schools, particularly in France. The schools of this order (which was founded in 1684) were superior to practically all other schools of that period in two respects. They were taught by teachers who had been trained in the normal schools maintained by the brethren, and they used the method of simultaneous or class instruction, instead of the method of individual instruction which was almost universally used. England was most backward in providing elementary education, almost no provision being made until the nineteenth century.

The accounts ordinarily given of elementary education during this period describe at length the development in Germany in connection with the Lutheran Reformation. In order to show that the educational development in this case was similar to that which I have described in the case of the Puritan Reformers in New England, I shall give a summary statement of the German situation.

A very close parallel to the New England laws requiring schooling in reading and writing, and the learning of a trade outside of school, is found in this statement by Luther: "My opinion is that we must send the boys to school one or two hours a day, and have them learn a trade at home for the rest of the time. It is desirable that these two occupations march side by side." It will be remembered that Luther prepared a very careful translation of the Bible into German and wrote two catechisms as a further aid to individuals in arriving at religious truth. Paulsen says, "Instruction in reading and catechism, which were to pave the way for the general use of the Scripture and assist in its interpretation, was the root-stock from which has grown up the Protestant elementary school."⁷

The religious motive continued to dominate the German elementary schools to the nineteenth century. The curriculum as represented in the Prussian regulations of 1763 provided only

⁷ *German Education*, p. 75.

for reading, writing, religious instruction, singing and a little arithmetic and some "general information about God, the world, and mankind."⁸

The German elementary teachers were men either incapacitated for other employment, or teaching to supplement their scanty earnings at some other trade. Describing these Paulsen says:

As late as 1738, the Prussian country schoolmasters were granted the tailoring monopoly within their respective villages for the improvement of their economical position. Some reading and writing, with the addition, at most, of a little arithmetic, was, of course, all that such men could manage; method of any kind was out of the question. It is not surprising, therefore, that, in many cases, the instruction never went beyond the first rudiments. Even in schools of a little higher standing, especially where the attendance was irregular, many children never achieved anything beyond a little reading and knowing a few things by heart. [For many] the instruction was never anything else but a torture, protracted through years, from saying the alphabet and formation of syllables to the deciphering of complete words, without any real success in the end, while writing was nothing but a rough and wearisome tracing of the letters, the net result of all the toil being the gabbling of the Catechism and a few Bible texts and hymns, learnt by heart over and over again.⁹

Such is the history of modern elementary-school practice, from its beginning in the sixteenth century to the end of the eighteenth. There was very little change in content, and practically no change in methods of instruction, during a period of one hundred and fifty years in America, and two hundred and fifty years in Germany. Contrast this with the remarkable change that has taken place during the last hundred years, a change in the whole conception of elementary education, its purpose, its content, and its method. The changes in this one century, are far more significant for teachers than all the development in elementary education in the previous history of the world. They were initiated by Rousseau and established in practice by Pestalozzi and his followers. The history of this practice will be traced in subsequent papers.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 141.